



Teaching about Heian Japan

By Melinda Varner

Until quite recently, many world cultures and world history textbooks for middle and high school classrooms devoted scant copy, if any, to Japan's Nara (710–784 CE) and Heian (794–1185 CE) periods. An examination of several 2005 editions of commonly-used secondary world history textbooks reveals that this state of affairs seems to be rapidly changing over the past two or three years, most likely in response to the inclusion of more content on this period in the National Standards for World History. As a result, many educators are finding themselves teaching about Heian Japan for the first time and grappling with the question of what is teachable about classical Japan during the limited classroom time they can devote to the subject.

While facilitating professional development workshops on East Asia, I have encountered world history teachers who report that they have taught *no* content on Japan prior to the establishment of the Kamakura shogunate. Undergraduate students enrolled in my university survey course on Japanese culture usually arrive in the class with some background on medieval Japan, but little knowledge of Nara and Heian Japan. This is problematic insofar as a full understanding of what predicated the major shift in Japanese society toward military government is difficult to acquire without some sense of the Heian court culture from which the shogunate emerged.

Professional lack of confidence in teaching about Japan's classical era was among the issues explored by a group of secondary teachers from around the United States at a two-week institute on Heian and medieval Japan offered by the Program for Teaching East Asia at the University of Colorado in the summer of 2004. The institute, "The Making of Japanese Culture in the Premodern Era, 794–1600," was designed to address several key themes and questions identified by lead institute faculty.¹ As a member of the program staff for that institute, I began to think about how to incorporate some of those guiding questions into a rationale that would encourage educators to include more material in their curriculum on this compelling period.

Questions useful for exploring the Heian period include the following: How did the Japanese mitigate what were often overwhelmingly powerful cultural influences from the Asian continent to develop a culture and national identity uniquely their own? What gave meaning to the lives of Japanese during the classical age? What lasting cultural legacies can be traced to this pivotal period in Japan's history?

The purpose of this article is threefold: to introduce the key cultural developments that occurred during the Heian period, to suggest some strategies for teaching about Heian Japan using primary sources from the period, and to introduce resources useful in developing lesson plans on this material. I will begin by offering a historical overview of the Heian period that examines how Japan alternately imported, adapted, and sometimes rejected Chinese and Korean cultural models. This complex process will be analyzed within four key topic areas: social structures, imported belief systems, language and literature, and finally, the arts.

Questions useful for exploring the Heian period include the following: How did the Japanese mitigate what were often overwhelmingly powerful cultural influences from the Asian continent to develop a culture and national identity uniquely their own? What gave meaning to the lives of Japanese during the classical age? What lasting cultural legacies can be traced to this pivotal period in Japan's history?



Dating to the year 1052, the Byōdō-in's Phoenix Hall in Uji is one of Japan's best surviving examples of Heian architecture. Originally the villa of Fujiwara no Yorimichi, it was later converted into a Buddhist temple. Photo by Melinda Varner.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE HEIAN PERIOD

The Establishment of the Heian Capital

The Heian period marks its beginning with the move of the capital city from Nagaoka to the site of modern-day Kyoto in the year 794 CE. The Kyoto basin was not the preferred location for the new capital. In 784, Emperor Kammu issued orders to move the capital north some thirty miles from its seat in Heijō (modern-day Nara) to Nagaoka. This decision was prompted in part by alarm over the growing political influence exercised by Buddhist temples within the Nara city limits. Soon after the court had relocated to Nagaoka, political rivalries culminated in the exile and subsequent assassination of the emperor's brother, Prince Sawara. The new capital and its denizens were soon beset by a series of natural disasters and misfortunes attributed, by the reasoning of the age, to the wrath of Sawara's vengeful ghost. Within less than ten years of its founding, the Nagaoka capital was abandoned and a new capital established at the location of a small village ten miles to the north. In defiance of the malaise surrounding its founding, the choice of name for the new capital, Heian-kyō — "peace and tranquility"—was clear evidence of the court's desire to quell any lingering malignant influences.

Social Structures and Chinese Models

Throughout the first century of the Heian era, cultural exchange with China was at its apogee. Chinese language was the written mode of communication employed by the Heian government and the aristocratic court officials who ran it. Things Chinese occupied a central place in Japan's intellectual and material culture. Evidence of Chinese influence can be observed in a number of Heian social structures, including urban planning, official documents, the structure of Heian government, and early poetic forms.

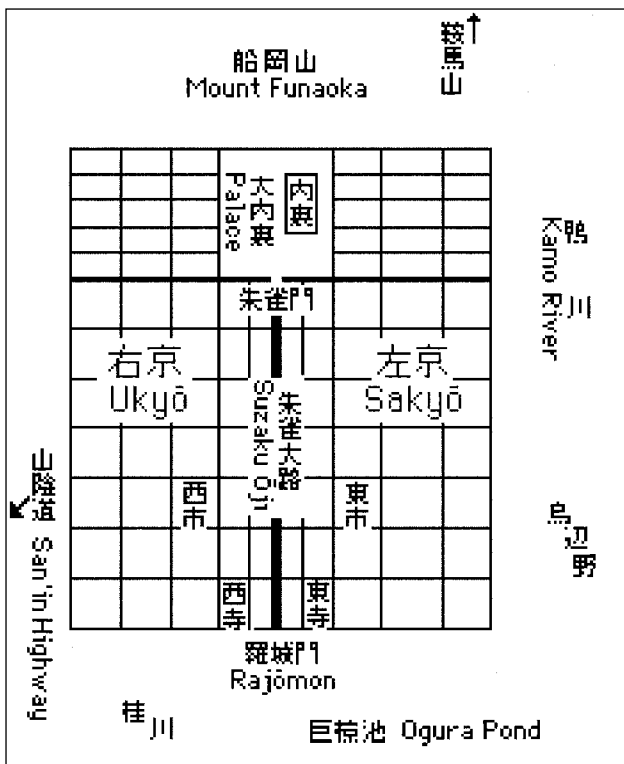
True to the Sinophilic tenor of the times, the designs of the Nara, Nagaoka, and Heian-kyō capitals were adaptations of the grid design observed in contemporary Chinese cities, including the Tang capital city of Chang'an (Xi'an). All three sites in Japan were selected with the aid of Chinese geomancy. Borrowing from Chinese conventions in urban planning, Heian-kyō was a walled city measuring roughly three by three and a half miles. Streets were straight and laid out along east-west and north-south axes.

Governmental structures offer further proof of the extensive degree to which China wielded cultural clout in early Japan. During the seventh century, the far-reaching Taika land reforms (645) and the implementation of the Taihō Code (702), policies clearly modeled on Tang institutions, sought to restructure court administrative offices and policies along Chinese lines.²

Ties to Tang China were maintained through regular diplomatic envoys sent from the early Japanese nation-state to the Chinese court until 894, when the long-held practice was suddenly halted. Sugawara no Michizane (845–903), a noted scholar of Chinese and close advisor to Emperor Uda (r. 887–897), cancelled a planned diplomatic mission to China to avoid absenting himself from the Heian court during a time when political power struggles with an influential clan, the Fujiwara, had reached a treacherous pass.³ For much of the tenth and eleventh centuries, a few aristocratic families—the Fujiwara foremost among them—exercised a virtual stranglehold on Heian court politics.

It is important to recognize that what we do know about this period is largely a history of the social elite who made up most of Japan's literate population during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Ivan Morris has estimated that out of a total population of five million people in the early Japanese nation-state, only one percent lived within the capital and of those, only a tenth of one percent belonged to the higher ranks of the aristocratic classes.⁴ It is from this astoundingly small and disproportionately privileged group that the majority of the surviving primary source accounts from the Heian period issued. We know relatively little about the lives of less-prosperous provincial officials (though brief and often comically derogatory glimpses of them appear in Heian prose literature), and nearly nothing about the peasants, farmers, and working classes that made up the bulk of Japan's population during this time.

Marriage politics played a central role in consolidating power within the cloistered circles of Heian-kyō's elite families. In this practice, which had no Chinese precedent, various



Heian-kyō city plan.

Image source: <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/ealac/V3613/kyoto/intro/cityplan.html>

branches of the Fujiwara intermarried their daughters with the imperial line until few emperors could claim a non-Fujiwara mother. As a result, key father figures for many imperial princes were their maternal Fujiwara grandfathers. Eventually, influential courtiers encouraged a program of early retirement for adult emperors and installed the first of many child emperors backed by a maternal grandfather exercising *de facto* power as regent. Later, high-ranking members of the Fujiwara clan would also succeed in acting as regents for emperors who had reached the age of adulthood. Although a few sitting and retired emperors attempted to break the hold of the Fujiwara upon the reins of power, what success they did enjoy proved short-lived.⁵

Not all adoptions of Chinese social models were successful. Adherence to the Chinese model of city planning seen in the Heian-kyō capital eventually disintegrated as the population grew to the northeast and portions of the original city returned to agricultural uses. The creation of a Chinese-style system of government bureaucracy ultimately proved too cumbersome to sustain in Heian Japan. Comparatively meritocratic government procedures in China were supplanted in Japan by a virtual monopoly on government office held by a small circle of Heian aristocratic statesmen.

There were also important distinctions made between the status enjoyed by emperors in China and Japan. While China's "mandate of heaven" provided for the removal of inept rulers or faltering dynasties, in Japan the imperial succession remained jealously guarded while power increasingly shifted away from the person of the emperor and into the hands of influential court officials.

Imported Belief Systems: Confucianism and Buddhism

Confucianism and Buddhism were also important loci of cultural borrowing during the Heian period. More than two centuries earlier, Prince Shōtoku (572–622 CE) and other officials of the early reform period became native scholars of Chinese Confucianism and Buddhism, and did much to promote both systems within Japan. Shōtoku's seventeen-article constitution of 604 sought to propagate Confucian concepts of ethical government in Japan with the inclusion of a series of maxims encouraging harmony and decorous behavior.⁶ In 607, Shōtoku began sending embassies of Japanese noblemen to China to study Confucianism, Buddhism, and the Chinese language—a practice that would endure for nearly three centuries.

Tradition holds that Buddhism entered Japan through the kingdom of Paekche in Korea around the year 552. Patronized by Prince Shōtoku and other early intellectuals, Buddhism was firmly established in Japan by the eighth century. During the Nara period, schools of Buddhism were imported from China in a relatively unaltered state, but by the close of the Heian period's first century, Buddhist sects were beginning to take on identifiably Japanese aspects.

Despite some early resistance, Buddhism in Japan achieved a relatively harmonious coexistence with Shintō, Japan's indigenous system of venerating nature spirits and ancestors. The transmission of Buddhist thought to Japan was expedited by means of a syncretic doctrine that recognized various Shintō deities (*kami*) as local manifestations of the newly introduced foreign buddhas and bodhisattvas.



"The Origin of Kitano Tenjin Shrine." (Kitano Tenjin engi emaki). Eight scrolls in color, c. 1219, Kitano Tenmangu, Kyōto. The artist is unknown. Early Sinophile Sugawara no Michizane was sent into exile in part because of the challenge he posed to the Fujiwara regency. Image source: *Japan: A History in Art*. Bradley Smith, Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. for Gemini, Inc. 1964.



"Portrait of Prince Shōtoku and His Sons." (Shōtoku Taishi gazo). Color on paper, late seventh century, Imperial Household Collection, Kyōto. The artist is unknown. Prince Shōtoku is credited with being an early supporter of Buddhism in Japan. Image source: *Japan: A History in Art*. Bradley Smith, Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co. for Gemini, Inc. 1964.



Amida Nyorai, Late Nara, Early Heian Treasure of Saidai-ji, now housed at the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Museum in Kamakura.

Copyright 1995–2005, Mark Schumacher, www.onmarkproductions.com/XXX/XXX.html

Hoping to prevent the Buddhist clergy from gaining undue influence in the court circles of the Heian capital (as had been the case in Nara), patronage emanating from the Heian court was judiciously awarded to clerics who located their temples outside of the confines of Heian-kyō. Two priests viewed with favor by the aristocrats they served were contemporaries Kūkai (774–835) and Saichō (767–822). Both established large monastic complexes in the mountains outside of the capital. Working within the Tendai school, Saichō founded Enryakuji temple on Mount Hiei, while Kūkai founded the Shingon (true word) school of Buddhism on Mount Kōya. Both Tendai and Shingon Buddhism appealed primarily to the literate aristocratic laity, due in part to the fact that exercising one's faith during the mid-Heian was an expensive proposition involving pilgrimages, commissioning of Buddhist images, and the resources to undertake such activities.

Not until the close of the Heian period would Buddhism successfully extend itself to the lower strata of society. Amidism, which popularized the worship of the Buddha Amida, was predicated on a worldview that held that enlightenment was no longer easily accessible to humankind and that only the divine mercy of Amida could ensure an escape from the cycle of death and rebirth. In the late Heian period, the monk Hōnen (1133–1212) founded the Pure Land school, which advocated the practice of *nembutsu*, the reciting of the Buddha's name, as a primary and more achievable means to salvation.

Buddhism in Japan was adapted from continental forms to better address Japanese needs. Hōnen's Pure Land school is one good example of this tendency during the late Heian period. Later, other sects with continental Asian roots (such as Zen) were so thoroughly domesticated that they became strongly associated with native culture.



Amida raigō triptych. Late eleventh century. Color on silk; Late Heian period.

Image source: *A History of Far Eastern Art*, Fifth Edition, by Sherman E. Lee. ©1994 Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated.

This phenomenon is not confined to Buddhism. Nearly four centuries after the end of the Heian period, during the Tokugawa period (1603–1868 CE), Neo-Confucianism would come to play an important role in building the government bureaucracy that sustained more than 250 years of domestic peace. In each case, an imported belief system was eventually shaped to fit native needs and in some fashion, was transformed by that adaptive process into something definitively Japanese.

Language and Literature

By the seventh century, the Japanese were using Chinese to write

despite the fact that Japanese belongs to a completely different linguistic family. The Japanese writing system required highly complex reconfigurations of Chinese language that utilized Chinese characters (*kanji*). Initially, a writing system known as *kambun* used Chinese characters to write Japanese, using both the phonetic and semantic values of the Chinese kanji. By the mid-Heian era, this arduous system would be supplanted by the creation of two types of simplified phonetic Japanese script, known collectively as *kana*, which was used in combination with the imported kanji.

Nara-period Japanese literary productions demonstrate the initial centrality of Chinese tastes. During the ninth century, a number of imperial anthologies of Chinese poems (*kanshi*), composed in classical Chinese by Japanese courtiers, were produced in quick succession. Imperially-commissioned early myth-histories (*Kojiki*, 712, and *Nihon Shoki*, 720) likewise took their cue from Chinese dynastic records.

While many men in the Heian court continued to compose written verse and prose alike in classical Chinese, the invention of the kana syllabaries was the catalyst that gave rise to Japan's famous vernacular prose literature, much of it written by court women who lacked



The Genji monogatari emaki (*The Tale of Genji* Picture Scroll), dates from the late Heian period. The above image is from Chapter 38: The Bell Cricket.
Image source: <http://f00.middlebury.edu/JA216A/genji/genji001.html>

the same level of training in written Chinese that their male counterparts possessed. The resulting gender divide in literary production is an important theme when examining Heian culture because most of the canonical work from this period was produced by women of the upper social classes.

The aristocratic members of the Heian capital's ultra-refined court circles were subject to exacting standards governing social comportment and polite behavior. In a world where social status was primary, court intrigue and the progress of aristocratic love affairs were major preoccupations of the literate classes. As a result, the literary sources to which we have access come almost exclusively from the hothouse environs of the upper aristocratic circles and, in a few cases, from Buddhist clerics.

Late tenth-century and early eleventh-century women presented their views of life and romance at the Heian court through three primary literary genres: court diaries (*nikki*), the five-line, thirty-one-syllable *waka* (or *tanka*) poetic form, and prose tales known as *monogatari*. During the height of the Heian period, literary works in each of these native genres became increasingly expressive of uniquely Japanese characteristics and aesthetic qualities.

Diary literature (*nikki bungaku*) provides students with an intimate window into the world of the Heian capital. A woman we know only as "Michitsuna's mother" is the author of the *Kagerō Diary*, a compelling memoir available in an excellent English translation by Sonja Arntzen.⁷ Consumed by the ennui of her relatively cloistered existence, the author documents the often-troubled course of her marriage to a high court official and provides the reader with glimpses into the interior life of a woman living at the apex of Heian society. Diaries were not always written by women. For example, *The Tosa Diary* was written by a male courtier (Ki no Tsurayuki). He intentionally adopted the persona of a female narrator and wrote in the vernacular language so strongly identified with Heian aristocratic women.

While it shares some characteristics with diary literature, *The Pillow Book* by Sei Shonagon is a work often classified as a miscellany (*zuihitsu*). Written with incisive wit and startling candor around the year 1000 CE, *The Pillow Book* is a highly readable amalgam of the author's observations, themed catalogues, and anecdotes of her court life as a lady-in-waiting to a Heian empress.

The great masterwork of the era is *The Tale of Genji*, a prose fiction work (*monogatari*) that details the romantic foibles of the "Shining Prince" Genji, an aristocrat with profligate romantic and artistic tastes. Penned by female court attendant Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji* continues to be upheld as one of the Japanese literary canon's finest works. In addition to the fine psychological shadings given to each of the tale's many characters, the fifty-four

While many men in the Heian court continued to compose written verse and prose alike in classical Chinese, the invention of the kana syllabaries was the catalyst that gave rise to Japan's famous vernacular prose literature, much of it written by court women who lacked the same level of training in written Chinese that their male counterparts possessed.

chapters of *Genji* are also imbedded with hundreds of waka poems embodying the aesthetic quality of *mono no aware*, a sense of finely honed artistic melancholy cherished by Heian esthetes.

Each of the authors mentioned above also composed waka poetry, a communicative skill essential to survival in the rarified atmosphere of Heian court culture. Waka are frequently incorporated as a portion of the narrative within prose literature. Contests at which the Heian elites gathered to compose waka verse were one form of many polite entertainments enjoyed within the court's patrician circles.

The Arts

After centuries of imitating Chinese forms, Japanese visual art came into its own in the mid- and late Heian period. This had not always been the case. Throughout the Nara period, Japanese visual arts were almost exclusively focused on Buddhist and Chinese themes. Buddhist sculpture and paintings were among the earliest art objects produced in Japan and tended to closely emulate earlier Chinese and Korean models. Likewise, early Heian paintings tended toward an aesthetic strongly influenced by Tang China. However, as the close of the tenth century approached, strict adherence to Chinese models was no longer considered necessary or desirable. By the late Heian period, vividly illustrated narrative picture scrolls known as *emakimono* emerged as the medium by which prose tales such as *The Tale of Genji* were disseminated.

Emakimono artists began to employ a uniquely Japanese visual language. This is well-illustrated by a famous twelfth-century emakimono depicting *The Tale of Genji*. The artists (scrolls included narrative written passages interspersed with illustrations and were created by several persons working together) devised a system of pictorial conventions that offer the viewer/reader intimate access into the emotions of the depicted characters. The “blown roof” (*fukinuki yatai*) perspective employed by emakimono artists is one such innovation that served to grant the viewer/reader a birds-eye view into the narrative.⁸ Another good example of the trend away from Chinese styles was the paintings of court life and distinctly Japanese subjects known as *yamato-e* (literally, “Japanese pictures,” as opposed to *kara-e*, or “Chinese pictures”), which began to be seen in the mid-Heian and late Heian period. *Yamato-e* styles also came to exert influence on *raigo* paintings, which depict Amida Buddha descending from the heavens to meet a dying believer.

Heian music offers one more case study in Japan's modification of outside artistic influences. Instrumental music known as *gagaku* enjoyed at the imperial court was directly modeled on Chinese court music (*togaku*) and Korean music (*koma-gaku*). Japanese musicians played many of the same instruments that their Tang dynasty counterparts did and composed pieces in accordance with Chinese musical theory. However, in later centuries the Heian court created a department for “native music” charged with defining the rules of musical performance and composition to better suit Japanese tastes.⁹

The Decline of Heian Civilization

By the late eleventh century, power had begun to pass from the aristocratic classes into the hands of military provincials. The unchecked proliferation of large, tax-exempt landed estates held by provincial officials with military powers under their command set the stage for the decline of the refined and comparatively effete Heian court and the subsequent emergence of the samurai warrior as a central cultural figure. The ascent of the samurai to power was accelerated when open conflict erupted in the mid-twelfth century between a retired emperor and the emperor currently occupying the throne. The repercussions of the initial skirmish would eventually spark the Gempei war (1180–1185), a period of intense disruption and massive destruction within the capital city that culminated in the establishment of the shogunal government in Kamakura and the end of the Heian period in 1185.



Detail from the illustration *Burning of the Sanjo Palace* from *Heiji Monogatari Emaki* (Scrolls of Events of the Heiji), ink and color on paper. Kamakura period, late thirteenth century. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Image source: *A History of Far Eastern Art*, Fifth Edition, by Sherman E. Lee. ©1994 Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated.

Teaching the Heian Period: Strategies

Examining patterns and sites of cultural borrowing as a major theme when teaching about classical Japan provides teachers a useful way to talk about the interactions of civilizations with their students. The introduction of continental Buddhism, city design, the Chinese origins of the Japanese writing system, and early governmental models are all topics that offer strong evidence of cross-cultural influence. The Heian era offers a case study through which students can concretely analyze the processes of cultural transmission and the subsequent nativization of continental models within the early Japanese nation-state. Conversely, having students undertake an examination of which imported structures didn't work within Japanese society can prompt new insights about cultural differences between continental Asia and Japan.

Because so much of the primary source material from this period is literary in nature—poetry, court diaries, and prose tales—the Heian period provides both history and literature teachers alike a wealth of resources to select from for classroom inclusion. A number of good lesson plans have been developed around Heian poetry, miscellanies such as Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book* and *The Tale of Genji* (see related article in this magazine).

Sonja Arntzen has written elsewhere about her own creative techniques for teaching Heian literature. Her innovative ideas include engaging students in learning about waka poetry through an *utaawase* (poetry contest) activity that recreates the Heian custom of holding court poetry competitions by having students compose waka on a traditional theme, in English. These waka are then judged by members of the class using Heian poetic conventions and tastes as a guide. Arntzen later builds on this exercise by having students produce sequences of *renga* linked verse.¹⁰

In my own classroom, I have had success with a writing activity in which students first read selections from Sei Shōnagon's *The Pillow Book* and then compose entries modeled on Heian aesthetic values, social customs, and Sei Shōnagon's own literary style, using some of the section headings from the original. Students invariably become quite enthusiastic about this assignment and are eager to share their own lists on Sei Shōnagon's varied themes: "hateful things," "elegant things," "things about which one is likely to be negligent," "things that lose by being painted," "things that are distant though near," etc.¹¹

Heian period art provides another excellent means for exploring the period. I have had students read a section from the diary of a woman at the Heian court such as the *Kagerō Diary*, the *Diary of Murasaki Shikibu*, or the *Sarashina Diary*, and after an introductory lesson on women's lives during the Heian period, depict in any artistic medium their vision of the passage assigned. I find this assignment sparks lively classroom discussions about the central role women played in creating Heian literature, and allows for more nuanced exploration of both literary themes and gender roles.

A variation on this activity is to use images from a traditional *Genji* scroll and pair them with the section of text they reference. I have students work in groups to analyze the choices made by the artist to depict each scene. I then ask them to present their findings to the class and discuss how the images used by the artist reflect or detour from the text. Many images from *Genji* scrolls can be found on the Internet. One book useful for this purpose is Miyeko Murase's *The Tale of Genji: Legends and Paintings*, which pairs a seventeenth-century set of *Genji* illustrations by Mitsuoki Tosa with commentary on each image (New York: George Braziller, 2001). While several excellent translations of *Genji* are available, I prefer Edward Seidensticker's version.

As students learn more about emakimono picture scrolls, they may be encouraged to create their own picture scroll versions of a chapter from the tale and then present their images to the class with an explanation of how they arrived at their own artistic interpretation based on textual guidance. To give students a better look at the techniques used to create the original picture scrolls, teachers may find the documentary videos *The Genji Scrolls Reborn* and *The Tale of Genji* useful (see video resource section).

Coherent English translations of excerpts from *The Pillow Book*, *The Tale of Genji*, *Diary of Murasaki Shikibu*, *Sarashina Diary*, *Kagerō Diary*, *Tosa Diary*, and other Heian-era works are presented in lengths convenient for classroom use in Donald Keene's widely avail-

Because so much of the primary source material from this period is literary in nature—poetry, court diaries, and prose tales—the Heian period provides both history and literature teachers alike a wealth of resources to select from for classroom inclusion.



Two illustrations by Mitsuoki Tosa from Chapter 2 of *The Tale of Genji*.
©1976 by Edward G. Seidensticker.
Published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1978

The wealth of Heian literary pieces available in translation furnishes the opportunity to incorporate highly readable primary source material into the classroom.

able anthology, *Anthology of Japanese Literature from the Earliest Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Grove Press, 1960). Lesson plans on some of these works are also available online (see resource list at the end of this article).

Conclusion

The Heian period offers educators a number of grounds for inclusion in a unit on Japan. Compelling personalities like Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shōnagon get students excited about learning more about the Heian aristocracy. The fact that this period offers many female perspectives on Japanese society rarely found in the medieval period is another reason to consider including this material in the curriculum. The wealth of Heian literary pieces available in translation furnishes the opportunity to incorporate highly readable primary source material into the classroom. The rich visual culture of the Heian era was characterized by the blending of art and literature in stimulating ways that make truly interdisciplinary lesson plans highly workable. These rich artistic traditions, superb literature, and engaging figures are the stuff of which great lesson plans on Heian Japan can and should be made. ■

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING

BOOKS

Anthology of Japanese Literature from the Earliest Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century. Donald Keene, ed. New York: Grove Press, 1960. If you can purchase only one text to teach about the Heian period, I recommend this useful compilation of stories, essays, poems, plays, and diaries dating from the ancient era to the mid-nineteenth century. While Keene's choice of excerpts from *The Pillow Book* exclude many of that work's wittier sections, the other selections from the numerous classical works are judiciously chosen and useful in the classroom. Other excerpts from *The Pillow Book* are readily found online.

The Kagerō Diary: A Woman's Autobiographical Text from Tenth Century Japan. Sonja Arntzen, translator. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 1997. When your scope and sequence will accommodate a full novel, this excellent translation is an enjoyable read and Arntzen's extensive footnotes (printed conveniently on facing pages) add many dimensions to the narrative.

Keene, Donald. *Seeds in the Heart: Japanese Literature from Earliest Times to the Late Sixteenth Century*. New York: Henry Holt, 1993. An excellent resource for teachers seeking more in-depth background information on Heian authors and literary genres, Keene's insightful commentaries on well-known works are helpful in formulating document-based questions for the classroom.

Matsunaga, Daigan and Alicia. *Foundations of Japanese Buddhism, Vol. I*. Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1974. A solid background resource on Japanese Buddhism.

Morris, Ivan. *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan*. New York: Kodansha, 1994. The most detailed introduction to life in the Heian capital available in English, this superb resource includes chapters on Heian politics, the leisure pursuits of Heian aristocrats, the status of women, and the imagined world of *Genji*.

The Princeton Companion to Classical Japanese Literature. Earl Roy Miner, Robert E. Morrell, and Hiroko Odagiri, eds. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985. Contains a variety of resources, including a listing of major authors and their works, a glossary of literary terms, historical maps, chronological lists of rulers, and diagrams of Heian architecture.

Schirokauer, Conrad. *A Brief History of Japanese Civilization*. Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt Brace Publishers, 1993. A brief, all-purpose overview of Japanese history. A second edition is forthcoming in 2006.

Varley, Paul. *Japanese Culture*. 4th ed. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000. More detailed than the Schirokauer text above. Includes short excerpts from major literary works and a wealth of cultural detail.

VIDEOS

The Genji Scrolls Reborn (60 minutes, Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 2002), a documentary, traces a Japanese team seeking to successfully recreate the mode of production for a famous set of *Genji* scrolls.

The Tale of Genji (60 minutes, Films for the Humanities, 1993) traces the plot as illustrated by a series of emakimono scrolls dating to the twelfth century.

An animated version by the same title, *The Tale of Genji* (110 minutes, Tokyo: Asahi Publishing Company, 1987, unrated), is available with English subtitles. One short portion contains a scene of brief (albeit animated and anatomically vague) female nudity that may not be appropriate for younger audiences.

Classical Japan and The Tale of Genji (45 minutes, Columbia, 1996) is helpful for an overall introduction to the period, though some teachers may find that its tendency to include footage of interviews with leading academics fails to hold the attention of younger students. However, the accompanying teacher's guide offers several well-structured, document-based lessons on Japanese literature that include student worksheets.

Gagaku: The Court Music of Japan (1989, US, 28 minutes), a somewhat pedantic video, offers good footage of gagaku performances that can be used to expose students to Heian music. Note: gagaku as performed today is an art reconstructed from Meiji-era interpretations of an earlier, Heian form.

INTERNET RESOURCES

ART AND CULTURE

The Costume Museum: The Rebirth of *The Tale of Genji*

<http://www.iz2.or.jp/english/fukusyoku/>

The English Web site for this Kyoto-based museum of traditional dress offers an easy-to-navigate site with many photos and diagrams of traditional Japanese apparel from a variety of periods of Japanese history, including the Heian.

Japanese Art History Resources: Heian Period (794–1186)

<http://www.art-and-archaeology.com/timelines/japan/heian.html>

Offers many Web links to art from this period. Also has a link to a page about Japanese art in general and several links to museums housing Heian-era art.

Tale of Genji Online Picture Scroll (Dartmouth University)

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~arth17/Genji.index.html>

This eighteenth-century hand scroll depicts the first sixteen chapters of *The Tale of Genji*, a fifty-four chapter epic novel written by Murasaki Shikibu (about 973–1030). The story follows the life and loves of Prince Genji.

HISTORY

Ancient Japan (Washington State University)

<http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/ANCJAPAN/CONTENTS.HTM>

An excellent source of background information covering Japanese history from prehistoric times through the end of the Heian period in 1185. Additional topics—including women in early Japan, the Japanese language, early Buddhism, music, visual culture, and much more—are also addressed. A good resource for students seeking historical context for sophisticated and creative assignments on premodern Japan.

Heian Emperors

<http://www.friesian.com/sangoku.htm#japan>

Features a list of all Japanese emperors, accompanied with the regents and shoguns during their reign and a genealogical tree of the Japanese imperial family.

Kyoto History and Background

<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/ealac/V3613/kyoto/intro/>

Provides a timeline of Kyoto's development, city planning information, and information about the imperial palace.

Timeline of Ancient Japan (Washington State University)

<http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/ANCJAPAN/TIMELINE.HTM>

An excellent multipurpose timeline. A number of helpful map graphics are also included.

LITERATURE

Japanese Text Initiative (University of Virginia)

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/japanese/texts/index.html>

The Japanese Text Initiative (JTI) places the full texts of classical Japanese literature in Japanese characters online. The primary audience is English-speaking students of Japan.

Some, not all, Japanese texts made available here are accompanied by English translations and are searchable by keyword. Texts available in English translation include *One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets (Hyakunin Isshu)* and a selection of Nō plays.

The Tale of Genji

<http://www.taleofgenji.org/>

Offers a brief summary and background of *The Tale of Genji*, and a detailed photographic tour of sites from the story. Each link has beautiful color photos as well as historical information.

CURRICULUM

Asia for Educators (Columbia University)

<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/>

A resource site for teachers developed by Columbia University's East Asian Curriculum Project (EACP), a national initiative devoted to supporting education on Asia at the secondary and elementary levels. Focusing primarily on China and Japan, the site features teaching units, lesson plans, primary-source readings, resource lists, bibliographies, and more. Lesson plan offerings include a multimedia unit on classical Japan, a lesson on early Buddhism, development of the Japanese language, waka poetry, Heian period history, Sei Shōnagon's *The Pillow Book*, and two lessons on *The Tale of Genji*.

"Courtship and Calligraphy in *The Tale of Genji*" lesson plan

<http://www.clevelandart.org/edu/cefa/asianodyssey/pdf/Genji.pdf>

The purpose of this unit for 9–10th grade students is to discover, through an examination of *The Tale of Genji*, the importance of calligraphy to courtship rituals in the Japanese court culture of the late Heian period (897–1185). Authored by Dana Noble of the Shaker Heights School System, Ohio.

Lesson Plan for Japan: *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*

<http://oia.osu.edu/ncta/japan/coffman-jpn.pdf>

Students work with readings of Sei Shōnagon's classic as a means to investigating Heian court culture.

NOTES

1. I am greatly indebted here to the lead faculty for that institute, Laurel Rasplica Rodd (University of Colorado, Boulder) and Stephen Miller (University of Massachusetts, Amherst), whose guiding questions for the institute were instrumental in shaping this article.
2. Varley, Paul. *Japanese Culture*. 4th ed. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000:27.
3. For more on Sugawara no Michizane, see Morris, Ivan. *The Nobility of Failure: Tragic Heroes in the History of Japan*. New York: New American Library, 1976, 41–66. These pages give a lively summary of the life of Sugawara no Michizane and the political tactics used by the Fujiwara to gain and maintain control behind the Japanese throne.
4. Morris, Ivan. *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan*. New York: Kodansha International, 1994: 79.
5. There were some exceptions to this trend. Emperor Uda (r. 887–897) was one such example. See also Morris, Ivan, *The World of the Shining Prince*, 207–208.
6. Varley, 25–26.
7. *The Kagerō Diary*. Sonja Arntzen, trans. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Center for Japanese Studies, 1997.
8. Varley, 87.
9. For a fuller discussion of early Japanese music, see the Ancient Japan Web site: <http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/ANCJAPAN/MUSIC.htm>.
10. Arntzen, Sonja and Janice Brown. "Old pond, students leap in, sound of laughter: Creative Projects in the Teaching of Japanese Classical Literature." *Japanese Language and Literature*, Vol. 35, No.1 April, 2001. Available online from JSTOR (<http://www.jstor.org/>).
11. Another lesson plan on *The Pillow Book* can be found in the teacher's guide that accompanies Columbia University's instructional video "Classical Japan and *The Tale of Genji*." The guide, which uses document-based questions, also contains lessons on *The Tale of Genji*, waka poetry, the Japanese language, and early Japanese poetry compilations. See the video resource section for more details.

MELINDA VARNER is a Program Associate with the Program for Teaching East Asia at the University of Colorado in Boulder, and a seminar leader for the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia in northern Colorado and Wyoming.